

**Conversations on
Isaiah 40:1–11**

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! Explore Advent Conspiracy (www.adventconspiracy.org), which aims to help Christians experience Advent and Christmas in a simpler, less commercialized way.

WHAT is important to know?

This passage creates a theological terra firma for a fearful people, not in the destroyed temple, the collapsed monarchy, or the broken covenant of the past, but in God's never-failing word. At a time when other tangible and intangible ways of relating to God have collapsed, the prophetic word is their anchor. This may be why vocabulary of speaking and calling, voice and word, calling and commanding dominates the text. Though everything else fails, God's word endures forever, and that God comes to lead them home.

(*Kathleen M. O'Connor*)

- ❖ What is the key word or words in these verses?
- ❖ What has happened in the life of the people of God that leads to this new announcement?

WHERE is God in these words?

For those who live in the midst of exile, cultural collapse, and communal disaster, there can be no true hope except in God. It is futile to hope in individuals or even in the strength of the community, for human beings are inconstant, are fickle, and break their promises. Eventually they wither and fade, not simply because they are mortal, but because they are untrustworthy. The only one who can be trusted to make right what is so badly wrong, who can lead Judah out of exile and into the promised land, is the one whose Word will alone "stand forever" (v. 8). (*George W. Stroup*)

- ❖ What does God do in these verses?
- ❖ What reasons are given for what God does?
- ❖ What do God's actions tell us about God's nature and intentions?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

The God we shall see, says Second Isaiah in this pericope, looks like this: on one hand, God will come with might and God's arm will rule; on the other hand, God will feed this flock like a shepherd. "Here is your God!" we say and so turn those who dwell in unforgiven past tenses to a Word made flesh, pregnant with God's "shall" and "will." "Here is your God!" we shout to those whose impending death has made them demand a miracle and so insinuate the mighty Word that alone negates our mortality against its every rival. "Here is your God!" we sing, and with Handel lift up our voice with strength, heralds one and all of good tidings.

(*Cynthia A. Jarvis*)

- ❖ What parts of this passage bring you comfort? Why?
- ❖ What parts do you find unsettling? Why?
- ❖ Where have you seen God work in your life, or the lives of others, in the ways described in these verses?

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

In the face of derision and indifference, we are to speak of this God whose fierce compassion and care for humankind trumps the power of the other "gods" who seem to enjoy sovereignty in human relationships. Advent is a time to hear the promises spoken or sung to the community of faith once again and then sit with them through the season. It is also a time for that community to find its own voice, overcome its objections, and speak words of comfort and assurance to anyone who feels separated or abandoned by God that God *will* arrive and *will* come in gentle power.

(*Richard F. Ward*)

- ❖ What does it mean for you or your congregation to make a smooth and easy way for God and God's glory to be revealed?
- ❖ How do our worship and our daily lives proclaim, "Here is your God!" (v. 9)? What more can you do?

Loving God, grant us hope and lead us to offer tidings of comfort and joy in this holy season. Through Christ, who has come and will come again. Amen.